

Between Science and Superstition

Photius, Diodorus Siculus, and “Hermaphrodites”

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The second half of Diodorus Siculus's *Historical Library* (books 21–40), a Greek work of universal history composed around the mid-first century BCE, survives mainly in the form of extracts preserved in two Byzantine works: Photius's *Bibliotheca* (ca. mid-ninth century) and the collections of *Excerpts* commissioned by Constantine VII (r. 913–959).¹ Although codex 244 of the *Bibliotheca* is our only source for several extended and often largely verbatim passages from the last ten books of Diodorus's history, Photius's choice of excerpts can seem arbitrary to modern eyes.² His tendency to

present passages devoid of their historical context has also proved frustrating to editors of the Diodoran text.³ However, Photius was not an undiscriminating excerpter. Rather, he was a sophisticated and critical reader of Diodorus, whose editorial choices reflect a wide range of scientific, social, political, and theological concerns. We can see such concerns, particularly regarding the definition of gender roles, behind the seemingly eccentric excerpts with which Photius opens codex 244: lengthy accounts of two individuals who were identified as female at birth but developed male genitalia during puberty and, with the assistance of surgery, lived the rest of their lives as men.⁴

As a reader and re-presenter of Diodorus to his elite ninth-century Constantinopolitan circle, Photius served as a bridge between ancient Greco-Roman and Byzantine intellectual traditions. Although Photius is sometimes described as being fascinated with the

1 Diodorus's work is usually known by the title *Bibliotheca historica*. Here I refer to it by its English title in order to avoid confusion with Photius's work. The portions of Diodorus's books 32–36 preserved in Photius and the Constantinian Excerpts are particularly valuable for the history of the Roman Mediterranean after the fall of Carthage in 146 BCE. They are the only significant surviving accounts of events like the Sicilian slave revolts of 135–132 and 104–100 BCE, for which, see P. Morton, “Diodorus Siculus' ‘Slave War’ Narratives: Writing Social Commentary in the *Bibliothēkē*,” *CQ* 68.2 (2018): 534–51.; and L. Pfuntner, “Reading Diodorus through Photius: The Case of the Sicilian Slave Revolts,” *GRBS* 55.1 (2015): 256–72.

2 In “On Historical Fragments and Epitomes” (*CQ* 30.2 [1980]): 477–94, at 493), P. A. Brunt's disdain for excerpters and summarizers like Photius, upon whom we now rely for knowledge of otherwise-lost ancient Greek and Roman works, is extreme but not uncommon: “Ability to pick out the essential elements in a story or a description and to condense it accurately was as rare among them as among the less talented students we may teach today. They were therefore at their best when they chose to excerpt or paraphrase their authorities. Unfortunately their choice was too often determined

not by the importance of the matters they enlarged on but by their value for entertainment.”

3 For example, the break between books 34 and 35 is particularly difficult to determine, so editors of Diodorus usually group the fragments of these books together.

4 I follow the World Health Organization's definition of gender as “the socially constructed characteristics of women and men—such as norms, roles and relationships of and between groups of women and men” and of sex as “the different biological and physiological characteristics of males and females, such as reproductive organs, chromosomes, hormones, etc.” (<https://www.who.int/gender-equity-rights/knowledge/glossary/en/>, last accessed 13 November 2019).

marvelous and monstrous,⁵ he is not interested in the hermaphrodite cases merely, or even primarily, as paradoxes. Rather, he is most interested in Diodorus's attempt to explain hermaphrodites as natural phenomena, which involved detailed descriptions of the surgical procedures they underwent to confirm their "true" sex. Photius's well-known interest in the study and practice of medicine would have given such details additional significance. In the background to his choice to excerpt this passage are broader concerns about individuals of ambiguous gender, such as eunuchs, and their cultural, political, and religious roles in Byzantium. In such a context, Diodorus's argument against the existence of true dual-sexuals (i.e., those possessed of both male and female sexual attributes) could help Photius and his readers build a scientific as well as a theological basis for confirming that human nature includes a gender binary, thereby affirming traditional gender roles.

Diodorus's Account of Hermaphrodites

Codex 244 on Diodorus Siculus's *Historical Library* comes near the end of Photius's *Bibliotheca*, between similarly lengthy codices on the fourth-century orator Himerius and the late first-century/early second-century biographer Plutarch.⁶ At the beginning of the codex, after summarizing his readings from the last ten books of the *Historical Library* (377a 25–28), Photius gives a brief introduction to Diodorus's account of hermaphrodites (377a 29–34) (see Table 1).⁷ The long passage

5 E.g., W. T. Treadgold, *The Nature of the Bibliotheca of Photius* (Washington, DC, 1980), 101–2, on Photius's affinity for strange and exotic content.

6 In keeping with the traditional interpretation of the *Bibliotheca* as a summary of the works contained in Photius's library, scholars have long used the term "codex" to refer to the numbered descriptions of "books" within the text, even though many codices describe more (or less) than one literary work. The codices also vary dramatically in length, style, and manner of composition. For example, Treadgold classifies cod. 243 on Himerius and cod. 245 on Plutarch as "epitomes copied without Photius' supervision" (IIIB) while he places cod. 244 on Diodorus in the category of "selections of excerpts" (IIIC) (*Nature of the Bibliotheca*, 90).

7 I use the divisions of Photius's *Bibliotheca* based on the pagination in *Photii bibliotheca*, ed. I. Bekker (Berlin, 1824–25). The editions cited in Table 1 are Photius, *Bibliothèque Historique: Fragments*, ed. P. Goukowsky, 5 vols. (Paris, 1959–91), vol. 6 (1971); Diodore de Sicile, *Bibliothèque Historique: Fragments*, ed. P. Goukowsky, 5 vols. (Paris, 2006–15), vol. 3 (2012); and F. R. Walton, tr., *Diodorus of Sicily XI: Fragments of Books XXI–XXXII* (Cambridge, MA, 1957).

that follows has been placed at the end of book 32 of the *Historical Library* by editors of the Diodoran fragments, since it is framed by the death of the Seleucid pretender Alexander Balas in 145 BCE (377a 34–377b 4).⁸ Diodorus's brief account of the death of Balas is also preserved in the Constantinian excerpts (*De insidiis* 38). A comparison of the Photian and Constantinian excerpts reveals that Photius (or the manuscript he was working from) lightly edited Diodorus's text by leaving out a few words and changing a few others, but the content of the passage is essentially the same.⁹

The individuals whom Diodorus describes in the Photian excerpt have historically been called hermaphrodites (sg. ἑρμαφρόδιτος), and that is how this article refers to them.¹⁰ Today they would be classed as "intersex," since they were born with sex characteristics that do not fit "typical definitions of male and female."¹¹ Although specific diagnoses are impossible, the individuals may have had a medical condition like 5-alpha reductase deficiency, in which bodies that are genetically male do not produce enough of the hormone dihydrotestosterone.¹² This disrupts the formation of the external sex organs before birth, leading many people with the deficiency to be born with genitalia that appear female.

Diodorus relates the first and longest of the hermaphrodite stories, the case of Herais, as an alleged portent of Alexander Balas's murder in Arabia, since

8 The Diodoran passage itself has received little attention, perhaps due to its fragmentary nature. The most detailed treatments are F. Kudlein, "Diodors Zwitter-Exkurs als Testimonium hellenistischer Medizin," *Clio Medica* 1 (1966): 319–24, which makes no mention of Photius; and R. Langlands, "Can You Tell What It Is Yet? Descriptions of Sex Change in Ancient Literature," *Ramus* 31 (2002): 91–110, which analyzes the passage alongside Ovid's tale of Iphis.

9 See Henry, *Bibliothèque*, 6:127, nn. 1 and 2, and Goukowsky, *Fragments*, vol. 3, 214–15, frag. 33, for a comparison.

10 Diodorus (as preserved by Photius) and other ancient authors also call such individuals "androgynes" (ἀνδρόγυνος; Lat. *androgynus*). The early editions of Diodorus that include the Photian fragments, beginning with Rhodomann's 1604 collection, use *hermaphroditus* and *androgynus* interchangeably in their marginal notes and commentary.

11 To use the definition of the UN Free & Equal: Intersex Awareness campaign (<https://www.unfe.org/intersex-awareness/>, last accessed 13 Nov. 2019).

12 "5-alpha reductase deficiency," *NIH Genetics Home Reference* (<https://ghr.nlm.nih.gov/condition/5-alpha-reductase-deficiency>, last accessed 13 November 2019). I thank Ralph Hexter for this suggestion.

Table 1. Structure and Contents of the Beginning of Photius, *Bibliotheca Codex 244*

Photius, <i>Bibliotheca Codex 244</i> (Henry)	Diod. Sic. Book 32 (Goukowsky)	Diod. Sic. Book 32 (Walton)	Contents
377a25–28	—	—	Photius's summary of his excerpts from Diodorus Siculus.
377a29–34	—	—	Photius's introduction to Diodorus's account of hermaphrodites.
377a34–377b4 ~ <i>Exc. de Ins. 38</i>	Frag. 33	Frag. 9d, 10.1	The death of Alexander Balas (145 BCE).
377b5–14	Frag. 34.1	Frag. 10.2	Introduction to hermaphrodite stories: prophecy of the death of Alexander Balas.
377b14–378b5	Frag. 34.2–8	Frag. 10.2–9	Story of Diophantus (born Herais).
378b6–39	Frag. 34.9–12	Frag. 11	Story of Callon (born Callo).
378b40–379a30	Frag. 34.13–15	Frag. 12	Similar events in Rome and Athens. Conclusion: impossibility of dual sexuality (being both male and female at the same time).
379a31–33	—	—	Photius's conclusion to Diodorus's account of hermaphrodites.

an oracle had warned the erstwhile king to beware the birthplace of a “two-formed one” (*dimorphos*) (377b 5–14). Herais, the daughter of a Macedonian named Diophantus who resided at Abae in Arabia, is identified as female at birth, and is married to a certain Samiades at a young age, apparently before the completion of puberty, as suggested by the events that follow (377b 14–21). The emergence of male genitalia begins a year after the marriage, and results in much confusion, including rumors of homosexual relations between Herais and Samiades (377b 21–378a 4).¹³ The marital tensions produced by the emergence of Herais's male genitalia lead to a court dispute between Samiades and Diophantus about the status of Herais—that is, whether she falls under the legal power of her husband (if she is female) or her father (if she is male) (378a 4–18). The case has a dramatic resolution when Herais opens her robes in court and reveals her male genitalia (378a 18–25). After this revelation, Herais begins to dress as a man, and surgeons complete the emergence of the male genitalia (378a 25–35). Herais changes his name to Diophantus (the name of his father) and serves in the cavalry under Alexander Balas, thus fulfilling the prophecy of the *dimorphos* (378a 35–40). In Diodorus's moralizing coda, Samiades names the younger Diophantus as his heir and commits suicide out of shame, thus showing that “a born woman could

take on a man's courage, while a born man proved to be less strong-minded than a woman” (378a 40–378b 5).

The next narrative of transformation, set in Epidaurus about thirty years later (378b 6–8), is much more concise, yet quite similar. Like Herais, Callo is identified as female at birth and also marries before the completion of puberty, only to have male genitalia emerge some time after the marriage (two years, in Callo's case) (378b 8–14). As with Herais and Samiades, Callo's subsequent relations with her husband are characterized as “unnatural” (*para physin*) (378b 14–17).¹⁴ The emergence of male genitals is confirmed through surgery (378b 17–31), followed by a name change (from Callo to Callon) and life as a man (378b 32–36). One notable departure from the story of Herais is that Callo is an orphan, so her legal status cannot be challenged by male relatives. Instead, Callo's court controversy concerns her role as a priestess of Demeter before her transition, since this cult and its rites were restricted to women (378b 36–40).

Diodorus then briefly describes another three cases of hermaphroditism in Naples, Rome, and Athens (378b 40–379a 18). In none of these cases is the individual named, and only their grisly fates are related in detail: in Rome and Athens, they were apprehended and burned alive. Diodorus concludes by asserting that these cases were misunderstood, and

13 378a 3–4: δοκεῖν αὐτὴν ταῖς ἀρρενικαῖς συμπεριφοραῖς καθωμιλῆσθαι.

14 That is, their marital relations involve some form of non-vaginal sex. See below for discussion of this phrase.

that hermaphrodites should not be seen as monstrosities (*terata*) in possession of two sexes at once. Rather, as the cases of Herais/Diophantus and Callo/Callon demonstrate, these individuals' outward appearance belies their true sex (379a 18–30). After Diodorus's conclusion, Photius notes that the passage has come from the end of book 32 and that many other authors have described similar changes (*peripeteiae*) (379a 31–33), before he moves on to an excerpt from book 34 on Antiochus IV's treatment of the Jews.

Photius's Editorial Methods

Photius's treatment of the Diodoran narrative of hermaphrodites is notable for its length: only the account of the Second Sicilian Slave Revolt is significantly longer.¹⁵ Photius appears to have preserved nearly completely Diodorus's detailed descriptions of Herais and Callo's upbringing, the emergence of their hermaphroditic condition, their surgical treatment, and its aftermath, as well as Diodorus's moralizing conclusions, while mostly disregarding the chronological framework of the Seleucid dynastic wars that led to the rise and fall of Alexander Balas (ca. 150–145 BCE).¹⁶ So why did Photius choose to preserve this section of Diodorus's work?

Photius's working methods are notoriously opaque.¹⁷ However, the prefatory letter to the *Bibliotheca*, addressed to his brother Tarasius, characterizes the work as a sort of reading guide that assembles, out of Photius's vast and diverse collection of readings, the material of greatest potential use and interest to Tarasius—and, by extension, to future readers in Photius's elite Constantinopolitan political, religious,

15 The hermaphrodite stories fill about six pages in Henry, *Bibliothèque*, vol. 6, whereas the account of the Second Sicilian Slave Revolt takes up more than twelve (386b 12–390b 35).

16 It is not clear that the passage that follows the story of Callo/Callon (378b 40–379a 30) is a direct, unedited excerpt from book 32, since it relates events that go beyond the chronological bounds of that book and is much more concise than the preceding narrative. However, Photius does not indicate that he is piecing together or summarizing passages from different sections of Diodorus's work (for example, by inserting δτι or φησι), or breaking away from the Diodoran text to insert his own opinions. In any case, Photius clearly considers these stories to form a thematic unit even if they did not appear together, within a single digression, in the original Diodoran text.

17 The most comprehensive analysis of these working methods remains Treadgold, *Nature of the Bibliotheca*.

and cultural milieu. Furthermore, the extensive prolegomena that Photius provides for the works collected in the *Bibliotheca*, in the form of explicit critical assessments of entire works (e.g., codex 70, a summary and assessment of Diodorus's life and work) as well as para-textual commentaries on individual excerpts, suggest that a great deal of deliberation, most likely between Photius and members of his scholarly "circle," went into the selection of passages, and that they were intended to foster further discussion among Photius's readers.

Photius makes few explicit statements about the criteria he employed when selecting material from the thousands of pages that made up works like Diodorus's *Historical Library*, making it a challenge to reconstruct the specific concerns that were in Photius's mind as he put together the *Bibliotheca*. Yet in addition to being a dedicated compiler of information from both ancient and contemporary Greek literature (as seen also in his *Lexicon*), Photius was a prolific writer in other genres. Many of his letters and sermons, as well as less easily classifiable works like the *Amphilochia* (an extended theological "Q&A"), survive. An examination across the range of Photius's writings gives a stronger sense of his scholarly interests, and of how these interests related to the political and theological concerns of his long and eventful career, than consideration of the *Bibliotheca* alone.

Such an approach to Photius's work can provide insights into the reading interests of an educated Byzantine audience—interests that, it is worth noting, differ considerably from those of modern scholars. A significant but underappreciated aspect of Photius's reading practices, as reflected in the *Bibliotheca*, is the broad range of information he gleans from texts that modern scholars would categorize narrowly as histories.¹⁸ Photius's interest in the works of Diodorus and other ancient historians is not merely historiographical; he also appreciates them for the insights that they provide into other areas of learning, including

18 The tendency to impose order on the *Bibliotheca* by creating generic classifications of its contents goes as far back as Andreas Schott's first Latin translation (Augsburg, 1606), which includes an index of authors that distinguishes "sacred" from "profane" works. In the prefatory letter to Tarasius, even Photius claims of his collection that "it is not difficult, if one wishes, to separate all the historical works on the one hand, and on the other books of various different types," though he has opted to arrange the works "in the order in which my memory recalled each of them," trans. N. G. Wilson, *The Bibliotheca: A Selection Translated with Notes* (London, 1994), 25–26.

philosophy, science, and medicine. Despite the wide and insurmountable religious gulf between them, Photius's capacious reading interests align with the scholarly outlook of Diodorus, who drew upon a wide range of mythographical, geographical, historical, and philosophical works to construct his own "universal" history.¹⁹ Indeed, employing "pagan" learning in the service of promoting Christian truth was Photius's lifelong work, but it was work that required care and diligence, and that left him vulnerable to attack from his political and theological opponents.²⁰

Their shared affinity for mining earlier texts for their most useful contents presents an additional challenge to analyzing Photius as a reader of Diodorus, since it can be difficult to unpeel the many historical layers within each text. This article bypasses questions about the sources of Diodorus's later books, and the extent to which Photius exactly replicates (or paraphrases or summarizes) the text of Diodorus that he had at his disposal. It focuses on the content that both men chose to convey to their readers, not on the "originality" of that content per se.

The remainder of the article analyzes how the style and the substance of Diodorus's description of hermaphrodites can be related to Photius's broader intellectual interests (and, by extension, those of his potential readers), as expressed in the *Bibliotheca* and in his other writings. Photius's motives in preserving the Diodoran text went far beyond providing mere entertainment to his readers, but instead were rooted in the deep and wide-ranging philosophical, scientific, and theological interests that have made him the exemplar of the Byzantine intellectual "renaissance" of the ninth century.²¹ The article focuses on three related themes: Photius as a critical reader of fictional as well as historical narratives, with an appreciation for the dramatic; Photius as a scholar (and perhaps practitioner) of medicine; and, most importantly, Photius as

a participant in debates over the proper political and religious roles of individuals of ambiguous sexual status (namely, eunuchs), who was eager to maintain scripturally ordained distinctions between men and women.

Photius as a Reader of Diodorus

Photius as a Reader of Narrative

Although Photius's primary purpose is not to provide entertainment and diversion, the dramatic appeal of Diodorus's hermaphrodite stories to him and his readers should not be dismissed. Photius himself offers clues to his interest in the drama of the hermaphrodite stories in his brief prefatory and concluding remarks (377a 29–34 and 379a 31–33), where he repeats Diodorus's description of the events as *peripeteiai*.²² Although this word can be used generally in the sense of a "sudden change," "strange occurrence," or "unexpected event," it has a more specific use in Greek tragedy, where it indicates a "sudden reversal of fortune" upon which the plot hinges.²³ By Diodorus's time, the use of such tragic techniques to enhance the excitement and emotional impact of prose narratives was a common (though not uncontroversial) practice among Greek historical writers.²⁴

Diodorus is explicit about the dramatic quality of the stories of hermaphrodites. In his introduction to the court dispute between Samiades and Diophantus in which Herais is finally forced to reveal her male genitalia, he comments, "Fortune (*tychē*) did in real life what she commonly does in plays (*en dramati*) and made the strange alteration (*to paradoxon tēs peripeteias*) lead to

22 377a 32 and 379a 33. *Peripeteia* within the Diodoran text preserved by Photius: 377b 5; 378a 1, 14; 378b 7, 41; 379a 4. In Diodorus's *Historical Library* as a whole: Langlands, "Can You Tell What It Is Yet?," 91–92.

23 LSJ, s.v. Aristot. *Poet.* 1452a (ἐστι δὲ περιπέτεια μὲν ἡ εἰς τὸ ἐναντίον τῶν πραττομένων μεταβολὴ).

24 Polybius's (2.56) famous critique of the sensational aspects of the historical work of Phylarchus, including Phylarchus's use of *peripeteia* and other theatrical devices, has led to much debate among modern scholars on the relationship between history and tragedy. Foundational is F. W. Walbank, "History and Tragedy," *Historia* 9.2 (1960): 216–34. R. Rutherford, "Tragedy and History," in *A Companion to Greek and Roman Historiography*, ed. J. Marincola, 2 vols. (Oxford, 2007), 2:504–14, provides an overview and bibliography. For the role of *peripeteia* and related notions in Diodorus's work, see L. I. Hau, "The Burden of Good Fortune in Diodorus of Sicily: A Case for Originality?," *Historia* 58.2 (2009): 171–97.

19 Recent studies have emphasized the range and sophistification of Diodorus's historiographical interests. See, e.g., many of the papers and the bibliography contained in L. I. Hau, A. Meeus, and B. Sheridan, eds., *Diodorus of Sicily: Historiographical Theory and Practice in the Bibliotheca* (Leuven, 2018).

20 For this aspect of Photius's intellectual outlook, see, e.g., P. Ashwin-Siejkowski, *Clement of Alexandria on Trial: The Evidence of 'Heresy' from Photius' Bibliotheca* (Leiden, 2010), especially 5–10.

21 A. Louth, *Greek East and Latin West: The Church, AD 681–1071* (Crestwood, NY, 2007), 158–61.

an accusation" (378a 13–14). The stories of hermaphrodites are not the only explicitly theatrical Diodoran excerpts in the *Bibliotheca*. Diodorus's descriptions of the First and Second Slave Revolts, to which Photius also devotes much attention, emphasize the reversals of fortune that characterize the careers of the slave leaders, as they are swiftly and unexpectedly raised to positions of great power only to be defeated and lose their lives just as quickly. The end of the Second Slave Revolt, in which the captured slaves kill each other rather than fight beasts in the Roman arena, is even described as "tragic" (*tragikē katastrophe*) (390b 34–35).

The dramatic reversals caused by Herais and Callo's sex changes, not only for themselves but also for the people around them (not least Samiades, who is driven to suicide by his former wife's transformation), give Photius's hermaphrodite narrative a novelistic flavor, especially since he has disembedded it from what was presumably a broader account of Seleucid dynastic strife in Diodorus's work to stand on its own. Photius enjoyed the well-judged use of "changes of fortune"—and particularly the appropriate balance between realistic and fantastical plot elements—in other historical works and novels he reviews in the *Bibliotheca*.²⁵ He says of the historian and geographer Ctesias, "The pleasure given by his account consists mainly in the structure of his narratives, which have much pathos and unexpected turns (*to pathētikon kai aprosdokēton*), and in the decorative element which borders on the fabulous."²⁶ He assesses a novel, the *Ethiopian Tale* of Heliodorus, in similar terms: "The narrative is embellished by adventures being experienced or anticipated, also by the unexpected and by incredible salvation from disasters (*paradoxois . . . sōtēriais*), all expressed in limpid and pure diction."²⁷ Additionally, although Photius does not appear to have been an avid reader of popular

25 See P. A. Agapitos, "Narrative, Rhetoric, and 'Drama' Rediscovered: Scholars and Poets in Byzantium Interpret Heliodorus," in *Studies in Heliodorus*, ed. R. Hunter (Cambridge, 1998), 125–56, esp. 128–32, for Photius's use of *drama*, *dramatikon*, and other terms derived from ancient Greek theater in his critiques of ancient novels, and for his interest in the "dramatic" qualities of these novels. The extent of Photius's awareness of the original performative aspects of Greek tragedy is debated, but lies beyond the scope of this article in any case.

26 Cod. 72, 45a, on the *Persica* and *Indica*. Trans. Wilson, *Bibliotheca*, 68.

27 Cod. 73, 50a. Trans. Wilson, *Bibliotheca*, 78.

hagiography, the dramatic courtroom revelation upon which Herais's story hinges would have been familiar to him and to his contemporaries as a common element of saints' *Lives*. One of the few such works that Photius includes in the *Bibliotheca*, the anonymous *Life of St. Athanasius* (cod. 258), includes a typical scene in which the holy man is falsely accused of rape and must devise a way to disprove the allegation (480b).²⁸

Although the strange and unexpected nature (*to paradoxon*) of the hermaphrodites' transformations lends them their dramatic quality,²⁹ Photius's interest in these passages does not simply reflect curiosity about (or concern with) the marvelous and monstrous. Photius read and critiqued several collections of paradoxes, including those of Damascius of Damascus (cod. 130), Sopatrus (cod. 161), John Lydus (cod. 180), Alexander of Myndus (cod. 188), and Sotion (cod. 189), but the amount of the Diodoran text that he preserves suggests that his interest in this section is not simply paradoxographical. Ancient paradox collections are characterized by economy of expression. For example, in his catalogue of portents recorded in Livy's Roman history, Julius Obsequens devotes a mere nine words to an instance of hermaphroditism in 122 BCE (*In foro Vassanio androgynus natus in mare delatus est, Liber de prodigiis* 32). The seventh-century historian Theophylact of Simocatta's records of prodigious births, as summarized by Photius (cod. 65), are likewise brief, taking up a mere seven lines (30b 10–14 and 40–42; cf. *Histories* VI.1 and 11). Photius is similarly terse elsewhere in codex 244—for example, in his summaries of other material from book 32 (383b 10–384a 30)—but not in his treatment of the Diodoran passage on hermaphrodites. Furthermore, as discussed below, Diodorus's conclusion, as preserved by Photius, contains a strong condemnation of the superstitious understanding of hermaphrodites as paradoxes—that is, as wonders to be entertained by, or, more balefully, as monstrous portents to be subverted.

28 For Photius's treatment of hagiography, see T. Hägg, "Photius as a Reader of Hagiography: Selection and Criticism," *DOP* 53 (1999): 43–58. The *Lives* of cross-dressing female saints (a genre absent from the *Bibliotheca*) commonly hinge on revelation scenes of their subjects' "true" sex. For ancient literary parallels, see Langlands, "Can You Tell What It Is Yet?," 109, n. 25.

29 Cf. 377b 6, 35; 378a 13, 25; 378b 23. According to Langlands ("Can You Tell What It Is Yet?," 109, n. 23), this word appears 345 times in the *Historical Library*.

However, a more immediate reason for Photius not simply to summarize the stories of Herais and Callo as “paradoxes”—and to preserve not just the “dramatic” sections of the Diodoran narratives (like the courtroom revelation of Herais)—is his interest in the theory and practice of medicine. This interest may have motivated him to take special note of Diodorus’s descriptions of the surgeries that Herais and Callo underwent to confirm the emergence of their male genitalia.

Photius as a Scholar of Medicine

Throughout the narrative Diodorus analyzes hermaphroditism as a medical ailment in need of treatment. He describes the initial condition of Herais, Callo, and the anonymous cases in Naples, Rome, and Athens as an ἄρρωστία, νόσος, or πάθος (cf. 378b 13–18). One of the most striking aspects of Diodorus’s account is the amount of detail that he devotes to the physical conditions of Herais and Callo before and during the emergence of their male genitalia, and to the surgeries they underwent to confirm their sex. First Diodorus describes the emergence of Herais’s male genitalia a year after her marriage (377b 22–35):

Τὴν δ’ Ἡραΐδα φασὶν ἄρρωστίᾳ περιπεσεῖν παραδόξῳ καὶ παντελῷς ἀπιστούμενῃ. φλεγμονὴν γάρ ισχυρὰν γενέσθαι περὶ τὸ ἡτρον αὐτῆς. Ἐπὶ πλέον δὲ οἰδήσαντος τοῦ τόπου, ἐπειτα τῶν πυρετῶν μεγάλων συνεπιγινομένων, καταδόξασι τοὺς ιατροὺς ἔλκωσιν γεγονέναι περὶ τὸν τράχηλον τῆς μήτρας. Χρωμένων δὲ αὐτῶν θεραπείαις αἱς ὑπελάμβανον καταστελεῖν τὰς φλεγμονάς, ἐβδομαίας δ’ οὔσης, ρῆξιν ἐπιγενέσθαι τῆς ἐπιφανείας, καὶ προπεσεῖν ἐκ τῶν τῆς Ἡραΐδος γυναικείων αἰδοῖον ἀνδρεῖον, ἔχον διδύμους προσκειμένους. Τὴν δὲ ρῆξιν τούτων καὶ τὸ πάθος γενέσθαι μήτε ιατροῦ μήτ’ ἄλλων τῶν ἔξωθεν παρόντων, πλὴν μητρὸς καὶ δύο θεραπαινίδων.

Herais, it is said, fell ill of a strange and altogether incredible infirmity. A severe tumor appeared at the base of her abdomen, and as the region became more and more swollen and high fevers supervened, her physicians suspected that an ulceration had taken place at the mouth of the uterus. They applied such remedies as they thought would reduce the inflammation, but notwithstanding, on the seventh day, the

surface of the tumor burst, and projecting from her groin there appeared a male genital organ with testicles attached. Now when the rupture occurred, with its sequel, neither her physician nor any other visitors were present, but only her mother and two maidservants.³⁰

Following Herais’s revelation in court, Diodorus then describes the surgery performed to complete the emergence of the male genitalia (378a 25–35):

Τὴν μὲν Ἡραΐδα φασὶν ἀποκαλυφθείσης τῆς αἰσχύνης μεταμφιάσασθαι τὸν γυναικείον κόσμον εἰς νεανίσκου διάθεσιν, τοὺς δὲ ιατροὺς ἐπιδειχθέντων αὐτοῖς τῶν φανέντων γνῶναι ὅτι κατεκέρυπτο φύσις ἄρρενος ἐν ὅμοιειδεῖ τόπῳ φύσεως θηλείας, καὶ δέρματος περιειληφότος παρὰ τὸ σύνηθες τὴν φύσιν, σύντρησίς τις ἐγεγένητο, δι’ ὧν ἔξωδεύοντο τὰ περιττώματα. διόπερ τὸν προσεσυριγγωμένον τόπον ἐλκώσαντας δεῖν κατουλῶσαι, τὴν δὲ ἀνδρὸς φύσιν εὔκοσμον ποιήσαντας σὺν ἐνδεχομένῃ δόξαι κεχρῆσθαι θεραπείᾳ.

Now that her shame had been publicly disclosed, Herais exchanged her woman’s apparel for the garb of a young man; and the physicians, on being shown the evidence, concluded that the male organ had been concealed in an egg-shaped portion of the female organ, and that since a membrane had abnormally encased the organ, an aperture had formed through which excretions were discharged. In consequence they found it necessary to scarify the perforated area and induce cicatrization: having thus brought the male organ into decent shape, they gained credit for applying such treatment as the case allowed.³¹

Although the narrative of Callo’s transformation is much more concise than that of Herais, it also includes a lengthy description of the surgery performed on the emerging male genitalia (378b 9–29):

30 Trans. Walton, *Diodorus of Sicily* XI, 449.

31 Trans. Walton, *Diodorus of Sicily* XI, 451, with my modifications.

Αὕτη τὸν ἐπὶ τῆς φύσεως ἀποδεδειγμένον ταῖς γυναιξὶ πόρον ἀτρητὸν εἶχε, παρὰ δὲ τὸν καλούμενον κτένα συριγγωθέντος τόπου ἐκ γενετῆς τὰς περιττώσεις τῶν ὑγρῶν ἐξέκρινεν. Εἰς δὲ τὴν ἀκμὴν τῆς ἡλικίας παραγενομένη συνωκίσθη τινὶ τῶν πολιτῶν. Διετῇ μὲν οὖν χρόνον συνεβίωσε τάνδρι, τὴν μὲν γυναικείαν ἐπιπλοκὴν οὐκ ἐπιδεχομένη, τὴν δὲ παρὰ φύσιν ὅμιλίαν ὑπομένειν ἀναγκαζομένη. Μετὰ δὲ ταῦτα φλεγμονῆς αὐτῇ συμβάσης περὶ τὸν κτένα καὶ δεινῶν ἀλγηδόνων ἐπιγενομένων, συνεκλήθη πλῆθος ιατρῶν. Καὶ τῶν μὲν ἄλλων οὐδεὶς ὑπισχνεῖτο θεραπεύσειν, φαρμακοπώλης δέ τις ἐπαγγελλόμενος ὑγιάσειν ἔτεμε τὸν ἐπηρμένον τόπον, ἐξ οὐπερ ἐξέπεσεν ἀνδρὸς αἰδοῖα, δίδυμοι καὶ καυλὸς ἀτρητος. Πάντων δὲ τὸ παράδοξον καταπλαγέντων ὁ φαρμακοπώλης ἐβοήθει τοῖς λειπομένοις μέρεσι τῆς πηρώσεως. Τὸ μὲν οὖν πρῶτον τὸ αἰδοῖον ἄκρον ἐπιτεμών συνέτρησεν εἰς τὸν οὐρητῆρα, καὶ καθεὶς ἀργυροῦν καυλίσκον ταύτη τὰ περιττώματα τῶν ὑγρῶν ἐξεκόμιζε, τὸν δὲ σεσυριγγωμένον τόπον ἐλκώσας συνέφυσε.

Now the orifice with which women are provided had in her case no opening, but beside the so-called *pudenda* she had from birth a perforation through which she excreted the liquid residues. On reaching maturity she became the wife of a fellow citizen. For two years she lived with him, and since she was incapable of intercourse as a woman, was obliged to submit to unnatural relations. Later a tumor appeared on her genitals, and because it gave rise to great pain, a number of physicians were called in. None of the others would take the responsibility of treating her, but a certain apothecary, who offered to cure her, cut into the swollen area, whereupon a man's privates were protruded, namely testicles and an imperforate penis. While all the others stood amazed at the extraordinary event, the apothecary took steps to remedy the remaining deficiencies. First of all, cutting into the glans he made a passage into the urethra, and inserting a silver catheter drew off the liquid residues. Then, by scarifying the perforated area, he brought the parts together.³²

32 Trans. Walton, *Diodorus of Sicily* XI, 455.

Diodorus's medical analysis of hermaphroditism and unusually lengthy descriptions of surgeries align with Photius's well-attested interest in the theory and practice of medicine. The biography of Ignatius attributed to Nicetas David, which is overwhelmingly hostile to Photius (with whom Ignatius alternated as Patriarch of Constantinople from 858 to 877), notes that Photius's mastery of "secular" learning extended even to the field of medicine.³³ The medical knowledge that Photius displays in his other works indicates that he may have been a practitioner.³⁴ Moreover, in the *Bibliotheca* Photius includes reviews of works by six Roman- and early Byzantine-era physicians and pharmacologists: Galen (cod. 164), Dioscorides (178), Dionysius of Aegae (185 and 211), Oribasius (216–219), Theon of Alexandria (220), and Aetius of Amida (221). In his review of the pharmacological work of Dioscorides, he cites the works of two other medical writers, Alexander of Tralles and Paul of Aegina.³⁵ If he had read the work of Paul of Aegina, Photius may even have been familiar with Paul's discussion of cases of hermaphroditism and the procedures for correcting ambiguous genitalia, which are broadly similar to those that Diodorus describes.³⁶

As has been emphasized in a study of Photius's "medical library," the medical works that Photius reviews in fact touch on a wide range of disciplines.³⁷ Photius describes the only Galenic work that he reviews, *De sectis*, as not strictly a medical treatise, but rather a prolegomenon to the study of medicine that is more concerned with philosophy (cod. 163, 107a). He also asserts that Dioscorides's pharmacological work has value for "philosophical and scientific theory" (cod. 178, 123b), while Dionysius of Aegae's collection of

33 *Life of Ignatius* 21. For a brief overview of the *Life*'s date, circumstances of composition, and relationship to the "Anti-Photian Collection," see Nicetas David, *The Life of Patriarch Ignatius*, ed. and trans. A. Smithies, with notes by J. M. Duffy (Washington, DC, 2013), xi–xii.

34 Especially *Ep.* 169; see also *Amphilochia* Qu. 322 and 149.

35 See M. P. Vinson, "Gender and Politics in the Post-Iconoclastic Period: The *Lives* of Antony the Younger, the Empress Theodora, and the Patriarch Ignatios," *Byzantion* 68.2 (1998): 469–515, esp. 477 for Photius's knowledge of these and other medical writers.

36 6.59. Galen also briefly mentions hermaphrodites, i.e., individuals supposedly possessed of both male and female genitalia, in his discussion of "female semen" (*On Semen* II.3.17).

37 M.-H. Marganne, "La 'Bibliothèque Médicale' de Photios," *Medicina nei Secoli* 22 (2010): 509–530.

medical theories, *Diktuaka*, is also a notable exemplar of dialectic (cod. 185, 130b; cod. 211, 168b).

A reader with interests as diverse and wide ranging as Photius could glean medical information from Diodorus's historical text to pass on to his own readers. Photius's treatment of other ancient works that do not have an explicitly medical or scientific focus also suggests that he read across generic boundaries and considered the information he found in these texts worth noting, even if this information could not be neatly categorized as "historiographical," "philosophical," "scientific," etc. In the codex that follows his treatment of Diodorus Siculus, for example, Photius condenses Plutarch's dozens of biographies of notable Greeks and Romans into some twenty-one pages of summaries and excerpts.³⁸ Although it is difficult to discern any overarching editorial principles on Photius's part, many of the passages of Plutarch he excerpts or summarizes have a medical topic. These range from a lengthy description of the Roman general Marius's treatment for varicose veins (398a 23–31) to a brief allusion to the illnesses afflicting Antigonus Gonatas (399b 10–12). These passages deal not only with practical aspects of disease and healing, but also with medical theory: for example, a discourse on the relationship between symptoms and temperament from the *Life of Aratus* (399a 1–21).³⁹

Although religion and healing had been inter-linked from the earliest days of Christianity,⁴⁰ there remained tension in Byzantium between the "sacred" pursuit of Christian truth and the "secular" science of medicine. The contrast that Nicetas David draws in the *Life of Ignatius* between his subject's spiritual purity and Photius's "worldly" wisdom (including his knowledge of medicine), to the clear advantage of Ignatius, is one indication that this tension implicated

Photius himself.⁴¹ Other evidence of the close, but often fraught relationship between religion and medicine in Byzantium comes from a text that is distant both chronologically and generically from Photius's codex on Diodorus Siculus, but addresses the efficacy of surgery on "afflicted" genitalia: the anonymous seventh-century stories of miraculous healings performed by St. Artemius at the Church of St. John Prodromos in Constantinople.⁴² As they describe the circumstances that brought patients to the saint's incubation cult, these stories demonstrate that doctors in Constantinople were confronted with a wide range of congenital, pathological, and traumatic gynecological and urological ailments, and that their initial recourse was often to surgery, usually to relieve swelling in the afflicted organ. The tales illustrate the coexistence and mutual influence of religious and scientific approaches to healing in Byzantium: Artemius appears to patients in the guise of a physician, and performs common medical procedures using standard instruments.⁴³ Moreover, the tales describe religious men consulting doctors outside the church, as well as physicians approaching the church for treatment.⁴⁴ However, many miracle tales seem to condemn the "scientific" practice of medicine by secular physicians, contrasting the cures performed by Artemius with the ineffective treatments of doctors who, like Photius, relied on Galen and other "pagan" medical authorities.⁴⁵

41 Vinson, "Gender and Politics," explores this strategy of Nicetas David.

42 V. S. Crisafulli and J. W. Nesbitt, *The Miracles of St. Artemios: A Collection of Miracle Stories by an Anonymous Author of Seventh-Century Byzantium* (Leiden, 1997).

43 Artemius appearing in the guise of a physician: e.g., miracles 2, 6, 22, 23, 39, 40, 42, 44; using medical instruments to perform standard procedures: e.g., miracle 3 (lancing a boil on testicles with a scalpel) and miracle 22 (the saint treats a hernia with a scalpel, then instructs a hospital assistant on follow-up procedures).

44 E.g., miracle 1 (an *archiatros* brings his son to the church for treatment), miracle 21 (a deacon consults surgeons in the Hospital of Sampson before coming to Artemius), and miracle 23 (a priest of the Church of Prodromos consults doctors before turning to Artemius).

45 For example, the anonymous author rails against surgery on female inguinal hernias: "So, where are the fine-sounding Hippocrates and Galen and the countless other quacks? Those who follow these authorities maintain that, since this kind of female complaint is only an inguinal hernia, people ought most definitely to make an incision on the folded skin of the female patient wherever the membrane bulges under the strain of the swelling. Artemius

38 Cod. 245, 393b 7–400a 6. T. Hägg estimates that Photius's codex covers about 2 percent of the original text of Plutarch: *Photios als Vermittler antiker Literatur* (Uppsala, 1975), 139.

39 Photius also condenses passages from Plutarch related to pharmacology: Olympias's alleged drugging of Philip Arrhidaeus (396a 33–39), from the *Life of Alexander* (77.7); and the death of Aratus by poisoning (399a 31–36; cp. *Arat.* 52).

40 To cite just one example, the church father Basil of Caesarea's formal course of education included medical training, as did that of other men in his circle, such as Gregory of Nazianzus's brother Caesarius.

The inextricability of religion from science in Byzantium, but also the tension between them—which was related to ongoing debates about the use of “pagan” texts in Christian intellectual pursuits—form perhaps the most important context for Photius’s reading of Diodorus Siculus’s account of hermaphrodites. This context and particularly the relationship between medical and theological explanations for sexual difference are the focus of the next section.

Photius and Sexual Difference

Photius’s brief introduction, in which he places Diodorus’s excerpts in their broader historiographical context (377a 29–31),⁴⁶ is the closest we get to his own analysis of the phenomenon of hermaphroditism. He begins by claiming that “many other” authors have told of such transformations (“Οτι πολλοι μεν και οιλοι ιστορησαν”). He then uses the aorist passive infinitive of the verb ἀναφαίνω (“bring to light,” “produce”) in indirect statement, indicating that the individuals concerned did not undergo an essential change from one form to another. Rather, they were “proven” or “shown” to be something different than what they had been thought to be: those who were assumed to be female based on their outward appearance (ἀπὸ σχήματος γυναικείου και ὑπολήψεως) were revealed to be male in both appearance and nature (εἰς ἀνδρός και σχῆμα και φύσιν ἀναφανῆναι). In other words, according to Photius, the change that takes place in the stories of hermaphrodites is that their originally deceptive “form” (σχῆμα και ὑπολήψις) is brought into accord with their “nature” (σχῆμα και φύσις).

This statement indicates that Photius is concerned with the “nature” (φύσις) of hermaphrodites: are they male, female, or both?⁴⁷ In his conclusion Diodorus provides an answer that is the key to understanding why Photius gives the excerpt on hermaphrodites such prominence (378b 40–379a 30):

followed none of these practices” (miracle 24; Crisafulli and Nesbitt, *Miracles of St. Artemios*, 143).

46 “Οτι πολλοι μεν και οιλοι ιστορησαν ἀπὸ σχήματος γυναικείου και ὑπολήψεως εἰς ἀνδρός και σχῆμα και φύσιν ἀναφανῆναι....

47 In both Photius’s introduction and in Diodorus’s text, the word *physis* may carry a range of meanings, including as a euphemism for sex organs: J. Henderson, *The Maculate Muse: Obscene Language in Attic Comedy*, 2nd ed. (New York, 1991), 5; J. N. Adams, *The Latin Sexual Vocabulary* (Baltimore, 1982), 59–62.

‘Ομοίως δ’ ἐν τῇ Νεαπόλει και κατ’ ἄλλους τόπους πλείονας ιστοροῦνται γεγονέναι τοιαῦται περιπέτειαι, οὐκ ἄρρενος και θηλείας φύσεως εἰς δίμορφον τύπον δημιουργηθείσης (ἀδύνατον γάρ τοῦτο), ἀλλὰ τῆς φύσεως διὰ τῶν τοῦ σώματος μερῶν ψευδογραφούσης εἰς ἔκπληξιν και ἀπάτην τῶν ἀνθρώπων. Διόπερ ἡμεῖς τὰς περιπετείας ταύτας ἀναγραφῆς ἡξιώσαμεν, οὐ ψυχαγωγίας ἀλλ’ ὀφελείας ἔνεκα τῶν ἀναγινωσκόντων. Πολλοὶ γάρ τέρατα τὰ τοιαῦτα νομίζοντες εἶναι δεισιδαιμονοῦσιν, οὐκ ἰδιῶται μόνον ἀλλὰ και ἔθνη και πόλεις. Κατ’ ἀρχὰς γοῦν τοῦ Μαρσικοῦ πολέμου πλησίον τῆς Πάρμης οἰκοῦντά φησιν Ἰταλικὸν γεγαμηκότα παραπλήσιον τοῖς εἰρημένοις ἀνδρόγυνον προσαγγεῖλαι τῇ συγκλήτῳ, τὴν δὲ δεισιδαιμονήσασαν και τοῖς ἀπὸ Τυρρηνίας ιεροσκόποις πεισθεῖσαν ζῶντα προστάξαι καῦσαι. Τοῦτον μὲν οὖν ὄμοίας κεκοινωνηκότα φύσεως, ἀλλ’ οὐ πρὸς ἀλήθειαν τέρας γεγενημένον, φασίν, ἀγνοίᾳ τῆς νόσου παρὰ τὸ προσῆκον ἀπολαλέναι. Μετ’ ὀλίγον δὲ και παρὰ Ἀθηναίοις τοῦ τοιούτου γενομένου, διὰ τὴν ἀγνοιαν τοῦ πάθους ζῶντά φασι κατακαῆναι. Και γάρ τὰς λεγομένας υαινάς τινες μυθολογοῦσιν ἄρρενας ἄμα και θηλείας ὑπάρχειν, και παρ’ ἐνιαυτὸν ἀλλήλας ὀχεύειν, τῆς ἀληθείας οὐχ οὕτως ἔχούσης. Έκατέρου γάρ τον γένους ἀπλῆν ἔχοντος και ἀνεπίμικτον τὴν φύσιν, προσώρισται τὸ ψευδογραφοῦν και παρακρουόμενον τοὺς εἰκῇ θεωροῦντας. τῇ μὲν γάρ θηλείᾳ πρόσκειται τι κατὰ τὴν φύσιν παρεμφερὲς ἄρρενι μορίῳ, τῷ δὲ ἄρρενι κατὰ τὸ ἐναντίον ἔμφασις θηλείας φύσεως. Ο δ’ αὐτὸς λόγος και ἐπὶ πάντων τῶν ζώων, γινομένων μὲν πρὸς ἀλήθειαν πολλῶν και παντοδαπῶν τεράτων, μὴ τρεφομένων δὲ και εἰς τελείαν αὔξησιν ἐλθεῖν οὐ δυναμένων. Ταῦτα μὲν εἰρήσθω πρὸς διόρθωσιν δεισιδαιμονίας.

Likewise in Naples and a good many other places sudden changes of this sort are said to have occurred. **Not that the male and female natures have been united to form a truly dual-sex type, for that is impossible, but that nature, to mankind’s consternation and mystification, has through the bodily parts falsely given this impression.** And this is the reason why we have considered these shifts of sex worthy of record,

not for the entertainment, but for the improvement of our readers. For many men, thinking such things to be portents, fall into superstition, and not merely isolated individuals, but even nations and cities. At the outset of the Marsian War, at any rate, there was, so it is reported, an Italian living not far from Rome who had married an *androgynos* similar to those described above; he laid information before the senate, which in an excess of superstitious terror and in obedience to the Etruscan diviners ordered the creature to be burned alive. **Thus did one whose nature was like ours and who was not, in reality, a monster, meet an unsuitable end through misunderstanding of the malady.** Shortly afterward there was another such case at Athens, and again through misunderstanding of the affliction the person was burned alive. There are even, in fact, fanciful stories to the effect that the animals called hyenas are at once both male and female, and that in successive years they mount one another in turn. This is simply not true. **Both the male and the female have each their own sexual attributes, simple and distinct, but there is also in each case an adjunct that creates a false impression and deceives the casual observer: the female, in her parts, has an appendage that resembles the male organ, and the male, conversely, has one similar in appearance to that of the female.** This same consideration holds for all living creatures, and while it is true that monsters of every kind are frequently born, they do not develop and are incapable of reaching full maturity. Let this much then be said by way of remedy to superstitious fears.⁴⁸

Here Diodorus explicitly rejects the superstitious interpretation of hermaphroditic individuals as portents, since they are not “monstrosities” (*terata*) that lack a natural explanation.⁴⁹ Indeed, Diodorus is at pains to

48 Trans. Walton, *Diodorus of Sicily* XI, 455–57, with my modifications.

49 Diodorus’s conclusions here are anticipated by his earlier discussion of hermaphrodite myths (4.6.5), and in particular, his claim that “there are some who declare that such creatures of two sexes are monstrosities (*terata*), and coming rarely into the world as they do, have the quality of presaging the future, sometimes for evil and

point out that the *androgynos* put to death in Rome had a nature (*physis*) “like ours.” Nor, says Diodorus, are hermaphrodites—or any human or animal, for that matter (he cites stories of hyenas)⁵⁰—true dual-sexuals (*dimorphoi typoi*), who are both male and female. Rather, hermaphrodites’ bodily forms at birth are a trick of nature that is easily and often misunderstood. Moreover, as the cases of Herais and Callo show, the true sex of such individuals can eventually be resolved through surgery, and they can go on to find new and valid places in society as men—in Herais’s case, as a son to the elder Diophantus, an heir to Samiades, and a cavalryman in the service of Alexander Balas. In other words, their gender roles can be brought into conformity with their newly confirmed sex. Therefore, the medical histories of hermaphrodites, if they are allowed to live out their lives, serve to affirm the separate natures of men and women, in Diodorus’s view.

At first glance, it may seem that Diodorus’s sympathetic characterization is a dramatic departure from conventional hostile understandings of hermaphrodites, such as those related in Photius’s *Lexicon*, a reference work that was intended to aid contemporary readers with the unfamiliar vocabulary of older Greek texts. The *Lexicon* defines a hermaphrodite as someone with two sets of genitalia, which allows him “shamefully” (*aischrōs*) to play both active and passive sexual roles.⁵¹ This understanding of hermaphrodites’ sexuality was rooted in Greco-Roman myths that continued to circulate in Photius’s time.⁵² For example, according to Photius’s summary of the mythological collection of Ptolemy Hephaestion (late first century CE), the youth Adonis, “having become an androgyne (*androgynos*),

sometimes for good.” Trans. C. H. Oldfather, *Diodorus of Sicily* II: Books 2.35–4.58 (Cambridge, MA, 1935), 361.

50 Aelian, for example, claims that hyenas “share the attributes of both sexes” (*NA* 1.25); Aristotle, however, rejects this interpretation (*HA* 579b 15–29; 594a 31–b 5). L. Brisson, *Sexual Ambivalence: Androgyny and Hermaphroditism in Graeco-Roman Antiquity*, trans. J. Lloyd (Berkeley, 2002), 137–40.

51 R. Porson, *Φωτίου τοῦ πατριάρχου λέξεων συναγωγή*, part 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1822), 15, l. 11: Τέρμαφρόδιτος. ή τὸν ἀμφότερα ἔχοντα τὰ μόρια, ἀρρένων καὶ θηλειῶν, φασίν. ή τὸν αἰσχρῶς καὶ ποιοῦντα καὶ πάσχοντα.

52 See Brisson, *Sexual Ambivalence*, 41–71 for the links in Greek and Roman thought between passive homosexuality, androgyny, and dual sexuality.

carried on with Aphrodite as a man, it is said, and with Apollo as a woman" (cod. 190, 151b).⁵³

Although Diodorus devotes more attention to the medical conditions of Herais and Callo than to the details of their sex lives, he does present their problematic sexuality as evidence of their untenable status as women, since their emerging male genitalia force them into "unnatural" sexual relationships with their husbands. For Herais, the dissonance between her gender identity and the form of sexual intercourse she is able to perform brings "shame" (*aischynē*, 378a 7–11) and prompts the court case to determine her status, and in turn her sex-confirmation surgery and re-identification as a man. This paradoxical situation may have resonated with Photius's understanding of proper sexual relations between men and women rooted in apostolic writings and exegesis. Although Diodorus's characterization of procreative sexual intercourse as "natural" (*kata phisin*) and other forms of intercourse as "unnatural" (*para phisin*) has deep roots in classical Greek philosophy,⁵⁴ to Photius and his readers it would resonate more immediately with the language of Romans 1:26–27. This passage is most explicitly expounded as a condemnation of homosexual intercourse in the Fourth Homily on Romans of John Chrysostom, whose works remained popular in Byzantium and are analyzed by Photius in the *Bibliotheca*.⁵⁵ Although Chrysostom is mainly concerned with condemning same-sex relations as a confounding and dangerous departure from the proper sexual roles of men and women, Byzantine penitential guides show a broader concern with discouraging other forms of nonprocreative sexual intercourse, including between husbands and wives.⁵⁶

53 In the same codex, Adonis is also described as the beloved (*erōmenos*) of both Aphrodite and Heracles (147b). W. Atallah, however, emphasizes the singularity of Ptolemy's interpretation of Adonis as a hermaphrodite: *Adonis dans la littérature et l'art grecs* (Paris, 1966), p. 48, n. 6.

54 Most famously in Plato, *Laws* 636c, where the "natural" pleasure (*γέδονή κατὰ φύσιν*) of procreative heterosexual sex is contrasted with same-sex relations "contrary to nature" (*ἀρρένων δὲ πρὸς ἄρρενας ηθηλεῖων πρὸς θηλείας παρὰ φύσιν*).

55 B. Baldwin, A. Kazhdan, and R. S. Nelson, "John Chrysostom," *ODB* 2:1057–58. Photius himself details his extensive readings (including the homilies on the Pauline epistles, codd. 172–74) in several codices. For Photius's treatment of the *Life of Chrysostom* by George of Alexandria (cod. 96), see Hägg, "Photius as a Reader of Hagiography."

56 For example, roughly contemporary with Photius is the penitential falsely attributed to John the Faster, which assigns relatively

Diodorus's ultimate interpretation of hermaphroditism as a confirmation of (rather than a challenge to) the essential difference between the sexes would have had particular resonance with Photius, whose ecclesiastical career brought him into contact, and often conflict, with figures of problematic sexual status: most notably, high-profile eunuchs like Ignatius, his predecessor as patriarch of Constantinople, who had been castrated as a young man.⁵⁷ Although recent studies have emphasized the diversity of Byzantine perceptions of eunuchs (e.g., as "ungendered" and sexually pure, or even as a "third gender"), they consistently defied straightforward categorization as male, and so remained problematic figures in political and religious life.⁵⁸ Their opponents (including Photius, at least in some cases) could argue that they lacked the two ultimate sexual virtues, viz., the ability to procreate and the ability to remain chaste, and that they were not "proper" men.⁵⁹

Moreover, eunuchs' dangerous sexual boundary crossing potentially extended to political and theological matters. For example, in two anonymous late antique hagiographies excerpted in Photius's *Bibliotheca*, the *Life of SS. Metrophanes and Alexander* (cod. 256) and the *Life of St. Athanasius* (cod. 258), the "androgyny" or "effeminacy" of court eunuchs is linked with their heretical tendencies. Both of these hagiographies blame eunuchs for the infiltration of Arianism

harsh penances for a man who has *arsenokotia* (anal sex) with a woman; M. Arranz, ed., *I penitenziali bizantini: Il Protokanonarion o Kanonarion Primitivo di Giovanni Monaco e Diacono e il Deuterokanonarion o "Secondo Kanonarion" di Basilio Monaco* (Rome, 1993), 59–93 *passim*.

57 See C. Messis, *Les eunuques à Byzance, entre réalité et imaginaire* (Paris, 2014), esp. 141–44, 216–17, and 330, for the representation of Ignatius as a eunuch and for Photius's hostility to him and other eunuchs (including John Angourios, discussed below).

58 The bibliography on eunuchs in Byzantium is extensive. For positive perceptions of eunuchs (including as a "third gender"), see especially K. M. Ringrose, *The Perfect Servant: Eunuchs and the Social Construction of Gender in Byzantium* (Chicago, 2003). On the other hand, S. Tougher (*The Eunuch in Byzantine History and Society* [Abingdon, UK, 2008]) emphasizes the "frustratingly paradoxical" (p. 109) nature of Byzantine attitudes toward eunuchs, and the coexistence of negative and positive perceptions. More recently, Messis, *Les eunuques à Byzance*, analyzes the representation of eunuchs in Byzantine texts (including Photius's *Bibliotheca*).

59 See Ringrose, *Perfect Servant*, esp. 11–18, for the significance of the ideals of celibacy and procreation to perceptions of eunuchs (and of gender in general) in Byzantium.

into the court of Constantius II after the death of Constantine, singling out the influence of “companions in heresy and androgyny.”⁶⁰

Byzantine perceptions of eunuchs (both positive and negative) were based largely on ancient stereotypes.⁶¹ Therefore, it is hardly surprising that Photius includes a number of “pagan” discussions of eunuchs in the *Bibliotheca*. For example, eunuchs play a prominent role, perhaps disproportionately to the original work, in Photius’s summary of the Persian history (*Persica*) of Ctesias.⁶² The most extensive treatment of the nature and temperament of eunuchs comes in codex 241, an apparently unfinished selection of excerpts from Philostratus’s novelistic biography of the sophist Apollonius of Tyana.⁶³ First comes a near-literal excerpt in which, following the emperor Domitian’s prohibition of the castration of men and the planting of vines in 92 CE, Apollonius quips, “our egregious sovereign seems unaware that he is sparing mankind, while he eunuchises the earth ($\tauὴν \deltaὲ γῆν εὐνουχίζων$)” (331a 5–10; cf. Philostr. *VA* 6.42).⁶⁴ Later in the codex Photius stitches together a series of short excerpts from a lengthy debate between Apollonius and his follower Damis on eunuchs, in which Apollonius asserts that “even eunuchs are liable to fall in love” and is presently proven correct by an incident within the Parthian king’s harem in Babylon (332a 12–20; cf. Philostr. *VA* 1.34–37):

Ο δὲ βραχὺ ἐπισχών· Αὔριον, ἔφη, ὁ Δάμι, μάθοις ἂν ὅτι καὶ εὐνοῦχοι ἐρῶσι, καὶ τὸ ἐπιθυμητικόν, ὅπερ εἰσάγονται διὰ τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν, οὐκ ἀπομαρτίνεται σφῶν, ἀλλ’ ἐμμένει θερμόν τε καὶ ζώπυρον. Εἰ δὲ καὶ τέχνη τις ἡν ἀνθρωπεία τύραννος καὶ δυνατὴ τὰ τοιαῦτα ἔξωθειν τῆς γνώμης. Ἔζων γε ὑπὸ τοῖς τῆς ἀρετῆς ὀφθαλμοῖς. Νῦν δὲ καὶ ξυγκατακείμενον εύρηκεναι καὶ ἀνδριζόμενον ἐπὶ τὴν γυναικα.

60 ἀλλοι τινὲς καὶ τῆς δυσσεβείας καὶ τῆς ἀνδρογύνου φύσεως συνθιαστῶται (cod. 256, 473a 25–26). Cf. the “androgynous eunuchs” ($\tauοὺς ἀνδρογύνους εὐνούχους$) in the court of Constantius (cod. 258, 479b 29).

61 Tougher, *Eunuch*, esp. 109–11.

62 D. Lenfant, “Ctesias and His Eunuchs: A Challenge for Modern Historians,” *Histos* 6 (2012): 257–97, esp. 264–67.

63 This work is also treated in cod. 190.

64 Messis, *Les eunuques à Byzance*, 97–98 for the revival of this prohibition under Justinian (Novel 142).

After a brief pause Apollonius said: Tomorrow, Damis, you shall learn that even eunuchs are liable to fall in love, and that the desire that is contracted through the eyes is not extinguished in them, but abides alive and ready to burst into a flame. And even if there were really any human art of such tyrannical force that it could expel such feelings from the heart [...] living under the eyes of virtue [...] yet now caught lying with a woman and playing the man.

In this rather incoherent passage, which carelessly discards long sections of dialogue and narrative, Photius’s main interest is in the ability of eunuchs both to feel sexual desire and to act on it, which can be dangerous when they are allowed proximity to women of high station.⁶⁵

Photius draws upon such hostile characterizations of eunuchs in his other writings. Most notoriously, in one of his letters to John Angourios (*Ep. 50*; cf. *Epp. 74, 87, and 130*) Photius rebukes this otherwise obscure *patrikios* and *sakellarios* for his interference in church mysteries, condemning him for his sterility and corruption, which goes against the church’s promotion of fertility and reproduction, and calling him an *androgynos*. Interestingly, though it is John’s involvement in ecclesiastical affairs that appears to have provoked Photius’s ire, he opens his letter by citing the Greek story of Attis, then claims that “current wisdom” treats individuals like John as female, confining them to women’s quarters.⁶⁶

At least in specific cases, then, Photius could make the argument that effeminate men such as eunuchs, who skirted the boundaries between male and female, posed a threat to the proper political and religious order when in positions of power, and challenged the traditional conception of male dominance rooted in the biological differences between the sexes.

65 For the purported ability of eunuchs to experience sexual arousal (and, in some cases, to ejaculate) as it relates to both negative and positive perceptions in late Roman and Byzantine society, see Tougher, *Eunuch*, esp. 79 and 97–98; and Messis, *Les eunuques à Byzance*, 150–52, for the relevance of this passage.

66 Τῷ Ἀττιδὶ μὲν σε ἀναφέρουσι, Γάλλον καλοῦντες, οἱ παρ’ Ἑλλησι σοφισταί· τῇ γυναικωνίτιδι δὲ σε κατακλείουσιν, ἀνδρόγυνον καὶ εἰδότες καὶ ὄνομάζοντες οἱ ἡμέτεροι σοφοί. B. Laourdas and L. G. Westerink, eds., *Photii patriarchae Constantinopolitani Epistulae et Amphilochia*, 6 vols. (Leipzig, 1983–88).

But Photius's condemnation of "androgyny" was not just invective; he also argued for the maintenance of proper gender roles in the private sphere, among members of his inner circle. In a letter to Tarasius upon the death of his daughter, for example, Photius encourages his brother to resist womanly tears, and to take his loss "like a man."⁶⁷

As Martha Vinson has argued, Photius's views on gender were deeply rooted in the physical, intellectual, and spiritual distinctions drawn in the Pauline epistles between men and women.⁶⁸ However, the opening of his letter to John Angourios shows that Photius was also willing to use "pagan" learning in the service of defending fundamental Christian principles. Perhaps, therefore, he was intrigued by Diodorus's medical argument in support of the separate nature of men and women, even in the most outwardly ambiguous case of hermaphrodites. In the stories of Herais and Callo, surgery serves the positive purpose of confirming "true" (male) sex. It thus corrects what had been Herais and Callo's problematic perceived status as "both" man and woman (or "neither" of these)—a status that was untenable in their sexual relations with their husbands and in their relationship to society as a whole. To Photius and his readers, moreover, Diodorus's text might raise questions about the rectitude of surgeries performed in the opposite direction: namely, the medical procedures that created eunuchs, which essentially tampered with what was set at birth (and thus created "androgynes") rather than revealing what had been concealed.⁶⁹

Conclusion

There is no way of knowing for certain why Photius chose to excerpt particular passages in individual codices of the *Bibliotheca*, or why he chose to review some works and not others. Nonetheless, this examination of just one long excerpt from the thousands of pages of text that Photius summarized or preserved suggests that ancient "pagan" works could hold resonances beyond conventional generic boundaries for a reader like Photius, whose scholarly interests extended into

nearly every branch of learning known to Byzantium and whose career blurred the distinction between the "sacred" and the "secular." It also challenges the modern scholarly tendency to categorize Photius's reading interests as expressed in the *Bibliotheca*—for example, by distinguishing "religious" from "secular" works, or "histories" from "novels." Although Diodorus's *Historical Library* is explicitly a work of universal history (one of many such works produced in the Hellenistic era), the passages that Photius excerpted from it are more difficult to categorize. Photius's interest in Diodorus's descriptions of hermaphrodites can hardly be called "historiographical," since Photius largely discarded the chronological framework that Diodorus originally provided, and the stories themselves have little value for reconstructing Seleucid history. The absence of a broader historical narrative gives the passage the flavor of a novel, as Herais and Callo go from secure femininity to the shock of a physically painful, legally untenable, and morally disquieting position between male and female, to the resolution of secure masculinity, after dramatic scenes in the courtroom and on the operating table.

Moreover, as Diodorus's moralizing conclusion emphasizes, hermaphrodites are an often-misunderstood human phenomenon at the boundary between the supernatural and the scientifically explicable, and so their rationalization has both spiritual and material significance. In light of Diodorus's conclusion, the details of Herais and Callo's surgeries are not simply interesting medical anecdotes. They also confirm the fundamental physiological difference between men and women, and all of the religious, political, social, and cultural implications of this difference, which resonated just as strongly in Photius's era, nearly a millennium after Diodorus's lifetime.

How did Byzantine readers of Photius react to the hermaphrodite stories that he had preserved? One answer comes from a marginal note that Theodore Skytariotes left in the thirteenth century in a tenth-century manuscript of the *Bibliotheca*,⁷⁰ at the description of the immolation of the hermaphrodite in Athens (379a):

67 Vinson, "Gender and Politics," 488, citing *Ep.* 234, esp. 163–64 and 171–72.

68 Vinson, "Gender and Politics," 488, citing *Amphibolchia* 72.48–51 on 1 Tim. 2:14–15 and *Ep.* 210.25–26 on 1 Cor 11:10.

69 I thank Ralph Hexter for this insight.

70 Venice Marc. gr. 450, transcribed by Henry, *Bibliothèque*, 6:132, n. 1.

τοιοῦτόν τι τέρας ἐφάνη καν τοῖς καθ' ἡμᾶς χρόνοις ὁ καὶ πρὸς ἄμφω τὰ γένη ἐγνώσθη μεθαρμοζόμενον, πάσχον τε καὶ πράττον τὰ φυσικά. πλέον, δ' ὡς ἔλεγε, κατεκράτει τούτου ὁ τοῦ ποιεῖν ἔρως, εἰ δέ που καὶ ἔπασχεν, οὐ κατὰ τὸ ἐκούσιον, ἀλλ' ἀναγκαζόμενος.

A monster of this kind appeared in our own times, who was believed to possess both sexes, and who could be both active and passive in sexual relations. But, as he said, the desire to play the active role was stronger in him, though he also played the passive role, not because he was willing, but because he was forced.

Theodore here refers to the perceived problematic sexuality of hermaphrodites—namely, they could play either the active roles of men or the passive roles of women—that went back to Greek mythology and that is also an aspect of hostile characterizations of eunuchs. Moreover, Theodore seems to overlook Diodorus's

argument against the “monstrosity” or “prodigiousness” of hermaphrodites, instead referring to the hermaphrodite in his own time as a *teras*.

Theodore's comment serves to emphasize the idiosyncrasy of Diodorus's analysis of hermaphrodites, and may give another indication of why Diodorus's account piqued Photius's interest. Diodorus's implicit sympathy for his subjects, his relative lack of interest in the prurient details of their sex lives, and his affirmation that such individuals could adopt conventional gender roles once their one true sex was confirmed stand in stark contrast with Theodore's expression of the more common perception of hermaphrodites throughout premodern history: at best as curiosities or objects of jest, and at worst as symptoms of broader threats to the community.

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